

Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge

Final Environmental Impact Statement

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Abstract

Type of action: Administrative
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Fish and Wildlife Service
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The 566-acre Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge is located in the Town of Shawangunk, Ulster County, New York which lies in the Hudson River/New York Bight watershed. The Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment analyzes three alternatives for managing the refuge over the next 15 years. Its six appendixes provide additional information supporting our analysis. The document also identifies a 5,960-acre Shawangunk Grasslands Focus Area that includes the refuge and contiguous, ecologically important land. None of the alternatives proposes Service acquisition of additional land at this time. A brief overview of each alternative follows.

Alternative A Current Management

We would continue to maintain 400 of the 566-acre refuge as open fields and grasslands, primarily by mowing, to benefit breeding, migrating and wintering grassland-dependent birds. Asphalt or concrete runways and taxiways cover 30 acres of the refuge, formerly a military training airport. We do not actively manage the remaining 136 acres, which are classified as upland hardwood woodland with some shrub land transitioning to woodland. Bird watching is the most popular activity at this un-staffed refuge, which is administered by the staff from Wallkill River NWR headquarters in Sussex, New Jersey. Wildlife observation, nature photography, and environmental education and interpretation are all permitted. Selecting this alternative would maintain the status quo in refuge management actions over the next 15 years. Thus, it provides a baseline for comparing or contrasting the two “action” alternatives.

Alternative B (Service-preferred Alternative)

Alternative B (the Service-preferred alternative) would expand our current grasslands management program with more intensive effort, using a wider diversity of tools and techniques, such as grazing, haying, prescribed burning, and applying herbicides to promote native grassland and discourage invasive plants. We would also restore the natural hydrology of the area to the extent that it does not impede our grasslands management. We would remove the runways and taxiways from 30 acres and restore them to native grassland, except where we can incorporate them into a planned interpretive trail. Alternative B would also open a small, man-made pond to fishing, and open the refuge to a fall archery deer hunt. We recommend this alternative for approval.

Alternative C (Shrub and Forest Emphasis)

Alternative C would allow all 400 acres of managed grasslands and open fields to revert to shrub land and, eventually to woodland, to benefit shrub- and forest-dependent birds of conservation concern for the Region. Re-establishing the natural hydrology of the area would become a higher priority, which would eliminate the small pond and the opportunity for fishing on the refuge. As in alternative B, we would also restore the 30 acres of runways and taxiways, create an interpretive trail, and open the refuge to a fall archery deer hunt.